

Computerized Recruitment and the Staying Power of Print

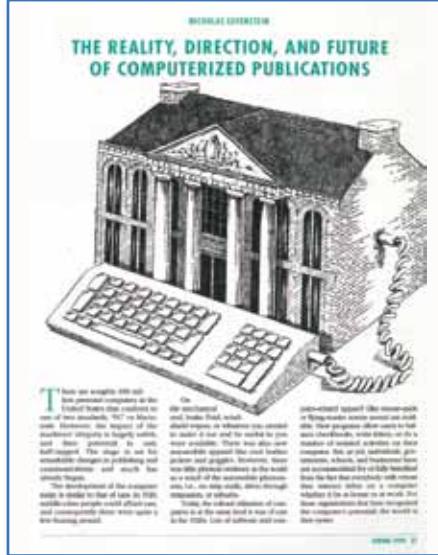
Response to “The Reality, Direction, And Future Of Computerized Publications” on page 86

The old adage, “The more things change, the more they stay the same” could not be more appropriate when looking back over the past 20 years—when the original article was published. Apple and Microsoft are still the two major players, college applications are still electronic (although they have evolved from disks), and prospective students still rely heavily on print publications. Granted, computers now have sound and have evolved from their original capabilities, but so have publications that can now be grabbed off the Web or downloaded.

From a data and CRM point of view, computers have drastically changed college admission. No longer are the days of 10 people crammed into an office built for one person, looking at a screen with a green blinking key, typing in thousands of characters an hour. Rows and rows of filing cabinets have been reduced, and putting students on hold to go look up test scores is less obnoxious.

But like the accessibility of cars in the 1920s led to service centers, drive-through restaurants and suburbs, access to computers has led to tech departments, Webmasters, and online marketing offices on college campuses. Admission offices have gone from administrators, counselors and support staff to also include CRM managers, marketing professionals, and data professionals. Admission, financial aid and the registrar are no longer connected solely by a building, but by a server as well.

From an admission recruitment point of view, the change has also been drastic, but in a different sort of way. There is a greater demand from students to have access to information in different formats, causing colleges to not only keep their traditional recruitment methods but add a multitude of continually evolving digital services.



Colleges still rely heavily on print publications, while adding more and more interactive services. I remember when I was an admission counselor and the Internet was introduced to the public. We all thought how great it would be because we would stop printing catalogs, view books, search pieces, postcards, etc. We would have fewer back-aches and could stop carrying those ugly brown publication cases around airports. Twenty years later, colleges are still printing and prospective students are still reading.

College fair tables still offer piles of printed materials—the difference being they now surround an iPad with an interactive college specific application. Students still leave with bags overflowing and counselors still lug leftover pieces back to their cars. Why hasn't the integration of computers into society allowed for the elimination of print materials? Because students still prefer print.

Carnegie Communications conducted a research study with 5,136 college-bound high school students. Findings show students today want print; in fact, more than 95 percent want printed material in their school evaluation process. The recruitment

publication *Private Colleges & Universities* received more unique student inquiries in 2010 than in the 26-year history of the publication. There are more agencies working with admission offices creating print pieces than ever before.

While print is still a major component, digital recruitment has added a whole new dimension to and demand on college admission offices. Colleges scrambled to integrate an electronic communication plan into their traditional media plan. Twenty years later, what is working?

The Carnegie Communications study reveals prospective students want both email and direct mail from their top college choices. Texting? Not so much. More than one-third of students don't want text messages and those who do prefer deadline notices only.

Digital recruitment has evolved past email and Web sites. Those are considered traditional recruitment methods these days. Computers continue to evolve and so does digital recruitment. In fact, it is a science now, balanced between search engine marketing, combined with online display networks, and optimizing Web visitors through retargeting.

So what has the *most* influence on students' college decisions? The campus visit. As they say, the more things change, the more they stay the same.



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